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ABSTRACT

The "1984" commercial used by Apple computers to introduce the Macintosh computer is analyzed to compare the production and reception of modern and postmodern imagery by a group of contemporary viewers. The commercial was based on George Orwell's famous novel "1984." The use of the novel as a theme for new product introduction, and the use of cinematic artistry to provoke the imagery of a postmodern vision of the technologically driven future are explored. While the canon of modernism is considered to represent capitalism and progress, the postmodern theme sees technology as repressive and antihuman. Postmodern critics see the world darkly, but they also bring a new vitality to humanism and the popular culture of diversity and a richer aesthetic life. Orwell's "1984" is a good example of a negative view of modern society as imagined by a postmodern critic. The production of modern and postmodern meanings by viewers of the commercial was studied through responses of 200 undergraduates to the commercial. Viewers noted several postmodern elements, and also recognized the product message, that the new computer would be a more friendly element in the technologically driven world to come. The negative imagery did not overwhelm the audience, as the purchase of Macintoshes following the commercial's debut proved. (Contains 43 references.) (SLD)

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Technology and Art: A Postmodern Reading of Orwell As Advertising

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by
Shay Sayre and Sandra E. Moriarty

Postmodernism provides a window of study for art, architecture, philosophy, politics, media, literature, and consumer culture. Modern and, to some extent, postmodern imagery focuses on science themes using symbols that characterize the machine, computer, and information ages. Little research has been conducted, however, analyzing advertising's use of postmodern themes, particularly its artistic use of scientific imagery. Furthermore there has been little research which takes the analysis of modern and postmodern imagery a step further and seeks to understand how consumers interpret modernist and postmodernist themes through their own readings of advertising texts.

This paper analyzes Apple's "1984" com-mercial developed for the introduction of the Macintosh computer to compare both the production and reception of modern and postmodern imagery by a group of contemporary viewers. The "1984" commercial was based on an adaption George Orwell's famous science fiction story titled *1984*. This paper analyzes the use of this novel as a theme for a new product introduction and the use of cinematic artistry to provoke the imagery of a postmodern vision of a technologically driven future.

In the TV ad produced by the Chiat-Day advertising agency and film producer Ridley Scott for Super Bowl viewers in 1984, George Orwell's chilling futuristic story was re-adapted to commercial use in a postmodern style. In what Kellner et. al.(1984) called a "negative utopia", indusrial mass production and a controlled society is revolutionized by the innovation of a new computer. A female metaphor for Apple challenges the totalitarian leader (read IBM) and, in the end, consumers can be seen as released from the bondage of hostile technology through the friendly Macintosh.

Modern and Postmodern

Various scholars have written on the definitional problems of the concept of *postmodern*. (Rose, 1991; Featherstone, 1991; Jencks, 1985) It is the nature of the term that it has to be defined by its contrapositional relationship to *modern*. While on one hand it can mean subsequent to or following, it also refers to the set of eclectic stylistic details that contrast with the spare, functional designs of the Modernist or International Style. On a larger plane it conveys its theorists' views of the failures of a science-based industrial society.

Definition, then, must begin with *modern* ideas about society and culture which reflect industrialization, technological development, and scientific progress. The modernist's optimistic view of science as bringing improvements to individual lives and society, intertwines with a fascination with new technology. The "canon of modernism" is capitalism and progress. Modern images are functional, streamlined, futuristic, and mechanistic.

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A counterpoint *postmodern* theme shows up in works like Orwell's *1984* which see technology as repressive and antihuman. They see the negative side of modernization and their images of modern society symbolize alienation, anomie, anxiety, anger, depression and repression, isolation, fear, self-destruction, and neurosis. On one hand, postmodern critics see the modern world through a filter of pessimism, but, on the other hand, they bring a new vitality to humanism and turn to the streets and popular culture to celebrate a diversity of styles, historical borrowing, and a richer aesthetic life. Postmodern uses a variety of codes that "live across time" in a "pastiche of value-laden styles."

Orwell's *1984* is a good example of the negative view of modern society as imagined by a postmodern critic. It is a nightmare vision of the future, a high-tech society populated by mindless clones who represent programmed humans trapped in their inability to act alone and think on their own. And yet Apple's solution to this dreadful situation is a computer, a scientific breakthrough that, in the best traditions of modernism, liberates the workers from the drudgery of their daily lives.

Postmodern theorists are often influenced by the political economy and Marxist schools of thought with their criticism of advertising as the flag-bearer of capitalism. According to McGowan (1991), an unthinking acceptance of con-sumer capitalism "links advertising with the totalitarian watchword" which induces a similar passive acceptance in the populace; a deformation of the signifying order. (p. 34) The theme of this commercial reflects Denzin's (1991) claim that commercial culture will "expose the oppressive limitations to freedom" that characterize the cultural logic of late capitalism (p. xi)." Derrida (1967) sees products, as well as advertising messages, as texts that are a rich reservoir of diverse meanings.

Reception Analysis

In poststructuralist theory, the individual viewer/reader is the final author of the meaning; therefore, there is a need for reader-response research to better understand the personal and idiosyncratic range of meaning produced by the varied readers of an advertisement. The most fundamental assumption shared by reception theory critics, who conceptualize the process of reading or viewing as a socially situated discourse (Jensen & Rosengren,1990), is that meaning comes from the interpretation of the reader rather than something that resides in the text (Allen, 1987).

Polysemic Meaning The idea that different readers get different meanings from a text, or the polysemic nature of meaning, is at the heart of the poststructuralist's criticism of effects and formalist studies. Literary explication often focuses on the multiple layers of meaning in a text. With reception theory, the focus turns to the multiple meanings perceived by the readers, or in this case, the viewers. Multilayering is an important message structure used in advertising because it makes it possible to communicate complex ideas in a restricted time and space. Peterson (1987) said that advertising's use of multilayered stories places new demands on recipients, and in turn the recipients supply new forms of interpretation.

Eclectic Viewing The reader's task, according to poststructuralism, is one of production rather than consumption, a process of dismantling and reassembling the thoughts and concepts to create a personal "reading" of the meaning, and literally "rewriting" the text in the process of making sense of it. The poststructuralist position is that meaning is not autonomous in the text, but created anew in every reading (Berger 1982, p. 35). Poststructuralist research into the meaning of an advertisement, then, focuses on varieties of meaning produced by the audience.

Similar to the effect of a John Cage musical experience, or the outcome of Jackson Pollack's "action art," television viewing in the 1990s has become a schizophrenic experience, a mixing of codes, and a violent overlapping of images. Viewing can be conceptualized in Rose's (1991)

terms as a new pluralism, piecemeal thinking, and ultimately radical eclecticism.

Radical eclecticism is experienced by all television viewers, including those viewers of Super Bowl who provided a viewing arena for the "1984" commercial. Through the clutter of unrelated messages juxtaposed by time and content, the viewer must make sense out of the image-intensive experience.

What follows is a sample of the types of images a viewer encounters during the two or more hours of typical Super Bowl entertainment: musical extravaganza ads for Coke, instant replays of a lineback's fumble, a five second news flash on flooding in California, previews of an upcoming network science fiction movie, highlights from past Bowl games, Nike's animated character (Hare Jordan) accompanying human Air Jordan in a basketball commercial, multiple network identifica-tion breaks, three Bud Bowl playoffs, numerous player profiles, the invasive Energized drumming rabbit marching through a parody of a commercial, a news brief about fighting in Israel, Murphy Brown stars promoting their next episode, Heartbeat of America ads, a viewer sweepstake game, a weather advisory. . . . and occasionally, the game itself.

In this polysemic blend of action, news and discourse on consumption, "advertising tends to function as backdrop, a reassuring litany of interwoven signs, into which the vicissitudes of the world are inscribed as a diversion." (Baudrillard 1990, p. 87). Like listening to Cage's music, the act of viewing becomes an eclectic experience which superimposes past and present, real and fictional, upon a structure of advertising intermissions.

With personal interpretations and a complex nonverbal message comes the opportunity for idiosyncratic meanings that deviate dramatically from the author's intended meaning, and may even approach a state of total misinterpretation. The semiotics expert, Umberto Eco, notes this problem and describes aberrant decoding as the rule in mass media, a warning which should give advertising experts reason to pause (Berger 1982, p. 35). While poststructuralists see idiosyncratic meanings as an indication of receiver creativity and engagement with the message, advertisers see them as message, and possibly advertising, failure.

Structural Analysis

Structuralism focuses on the form of the message as it looks for universal structures such as narratives and myths that are basic to cultural understanding. Poststructuralism is less concerned with the idea of dominant forms and narratives and more interested in multiple meanings and marginalized themes.

Intertextuality A concept important to poststructuralist meaning analysis is intertextuality, which refers to the fact that one story may convey meaning by referring to another story; the co-presence of two or more texts. This is important because Jencks' definition of postmodern is "double-coding," meaning that one theme or style is embedded in another. (1985) With Jencks' definition in mind, the "1984" commercial is a classic example of a postmodern message strategy.

An intertextual logic governs the basic structure behind the "1984" commercial. It announces the introduction of a new product, but that product launch message is embedded within a science fiction storyline. It also implies an association between IBM and Big Brother and between Apple and the woman hurler who destroys the Big Brother imagery. Furthermore, this complex narrative is constructed through visuals; essentially this is nonverbal communication with words used only to symbolize ideological rhetoric.

Simulcras The disconnectedness of experience relates to Jameson's other feature of the postmodern, the transformation of reality into images. Baudrillard's (1981) simulcra, the imagery which is more real than reality, is particularly evident in the characterization of the electronic Big Brother. Akin to Jameson's philosophy and to

Baudrillard's discussion of postmodern imagist culture, this commercial's message is communicated entirely through its "visual rhetoric." (Scott 1990)

Semiotic Meaning

Culture interacts with advertising to create meaning in products as well as in messages. John Sherry (1987) explains that, "as a form of metacommunication on the order of myth and ritual, advertising works at the level of semiology to invest goods with meaning." Semiotics, perfected by Barthes (1989) and skillfully applied to advertising by Williams (1974), has been found to be an effective method to deconstruct symbols and signs in texts. Playing to marketing-oriented consumers, advertisers are specialists in symbolic production who construct cultural readings of social themes--power, class, race, gender, revolution, success, and happiness (Denzin 1991). Their work provides an ideal forum for the deconstruction of symbolic meanings using semiotics.

There have been two interesting efforts using semiotic approaches to explicate meaning in Apple's "1984" commercial. Berger (1989) provided a synopsis, background and interpretation of the main images and symbolic meanings found in the commercial. Scott (1991) performed close readings of the various messages which can be interpreted from the ad.

Berger used oppositional patterns to detect meaning, a method derived from the ordering of the elements of meaning in a narrative as expressed through diachronic analysis which looks at the structure and order of the narrative. A semiotic approach to deconstructing meaning is to take it apart in terms of its basic logic. Semiotics provides clues in how to analyze the form and logic of its oppositional structures. As Berger (1982) explains, the basic relationship in meaning is oppositional. In other words, like definitions of postmodernism, we define and know something in terms of what it is not--so a semiotic interpretation will look for synchronic patterns that can be expressed as bi-polar oppositions.

Oppositions A postmodern analysis of the commercial "1984" presents it as a confrontation with contradictions. Contradictions, according to Denzin (1991), are the interpretive accounts that allow individuals to come to grips with the contemporary world . . ."cultural practices, which turn on pastiche, parody and the effacement of the boundaries between the past, the present and the future, must be connected to contradictions in late capitalism (p. 12)." "Postmodernism," says Hassan, veers toward open, playful, optative, disjunctive, displaced, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of fragments, an ideology of fracture" (Rose 1991, p. 52). Among his long list of postmodern dichotomies are: narrative/antinarrative, form/antiform, hierarchy/anarchy, and determinancy/interdeterminancy.

In the "1984" commercial, dichotomies are well crafted by Chiat/Day, the advertising agency who produced the spot for Apple, by emphasizing desire rather than the ego, heros versus antiheros, freedom and liberation versus control and domination, an individual versus the mass, and images rather than words.

THE STUDY

In addition to interpretive analyses of the modern and postmodern elements, this study also focused on viewer perceptions of the meanings of the commercial.

Methodology

Interpretive consumer research, now established as a legitimate discipline (Mick, 1988; Sherry 1987), has enabled advertis-ers to better understand the cognitive processing of their audiences and can serve as a logic of discovery. Equipped with a library of advertising culture, consumers possess an attitude of reception that is aesthetic, skeptical, and ironic, as expected of postmodern audiences.

According to Stern (1989), the application of literary criticism to advertising text can enhance knowledge of consumer behavior. Interpretive analysis can also be used to deconstruct meaning in the message by

explicating themes and the appropriateness of the various symbolic meanings used by consumers.

Respondents The viewers were 200 undergraduate students in introductory mass communication courses at two state universities in the western U.S. Clearly the audience is different in many ways from the original audience; but the point of this study is to analyze the production of modern and postmodern meanings by viewers---not copytest the commercial for its effectiveness---so these audience differences are not seen as critical for this particular type of analysis.

In class, the situation surrounding the viewing of the commercial was explained and the assumptions made by the creative team about the knowledge level of the target audience were also noted. Fewer than 5% of the student viewers had seen the commercial previously, and none had seen the original broadcast.

Using a form of modified thought-listing, the response form asked viewers to explain the meaning of the commercial and what the various symbols and images represented in their own words. Their responses were coded using a form of interpretive content analysis with the categories determined by the message elements and oppositional structures identified in interpretive analyses of this commercial by Berger (1989) and Scott (1991). Beyond the categories, words and phrases of identification and description were identified as representing either intended or idiosyncratic meanings and modern or postmodern themes.

FINDINGS

One aspect of postmodernism hails the demise of the predictable dominant narrative form, however it also recognizes metanarratives that drive individualized or marginalized interpretations, such as cultural myths which transcend region and locale. Postmodern cultural heroes, defined by race, gender and income, are often electronically connected to the modern narrative of "the American dream." (Denzin 1991). In "1984" the American Dream of progress through technology turns into a nightmare but the hero, or in this case the heroine, saves us with a computer that will liberate the mindless.

Metanarratives We can identify a series of other metanarratives in "1984", including David and Goliath, feminism, future visions (or science fiction) in the viewers' idiosyncratic interpretations. As noted by Lyotard (1984), past discourse predicated in reason, science, and truth (modernism and empiricism) has been replaced with a new system derived from the structures of narrative knowledge lodged in everyday life, folklore, myth ideology and folk heroes. Science fiction, the old modernist narrative, now looks quaint when compared to postmodern eclectic imagery.

The commercial is a set of layered metanarratives, driven by the David and Goliath myth, as noted by Berger, that makes complex demands on viewers' meaning production. It is reinterpreted from this mythical narrative to images of an electronic (un)reality and then redefined at the end as an advertising sales pitch for a new product.

Intertextual Themes The viewers' responses can also be analyzed in terms of notions of intertextuality and the relation between the master narrative and the embedded metanarratives. In terms of how the viewers perceived the basic intertextual logic, 48 percent focused on the product introduction story in their retelling of the meaning of the commercial, while only 10 percent focused on the *1984* storyline. Another 33 percent noted both stories and referred to them equally in their discussions of the commercials meaning. Clearly the product introduction message, as obliquely presented as it was, did not get lost in the dramatic imagery and narrative of the original story.

One of the metanarratives mentioned by Berger described the woman's role as David (David and Goliath myth) destroying the power of the giant. None of the

viewers saw that meaning in the commercial, although several of them did see her as a 'destroyer' (6) or 'destroying old ways' (2). Another Berger metanarrative was the mythic hero; five students did see her as the 'hero,' 'white knight', or 'Thor.' (Note the gender change in some of these identifications.) Seven others said she was the 'savior,' three said 'leader,' and others called her a 'liberator,' 'rescuer' and 'last patriot.'

Another small group of viewers saw her as either a feminist or a sexist image. One viewer, for example, in a completely idiosyncratic reading, referred to her as a "Hooter's Chick."

Of note here were several intertextual relationships mentioned by students. One which stands out were the references to Hitler, Nazis, concentration camps, and communism. Perhaps the disintegration of Eastern Europe and the resurgence of the neo-Nazi party caused these viewers to make references from another time and place. One student thought the runner had a Nike shirt on, and another thought the ad was for Nike shoes. These references to another commercial are indicative of layers of meaning accumulated by the postmodern commercial viewer.

Eclecticism In the Macintosh commercial, some message elements were interpreted by viewers in much the same way as the producers intended and in line with the interpretations of Scott (1991) and Berger (1989). The elements that contained the most agreement were: Big Brother's message which represented ideological doubletalk (76% agreement), the woman who was seen as symbolizing resistance or Apple (73%), and the setting of tubes and tunnels which represented control and conformity (64% agreement). While there was a great deal of agreement on these elements, they also carried some interesting idiosyncratic meanings. The woman runner, for example, was seen as Eve, a feminist symbol as well as a sex symbol ("Hooter's Chick"), a patriot, a bolt of lightning, and a mythical hero (Thor, white knight). An intertextual reference was apparent in the response of one who saw her as a figure from a Nike commercial.

Those elements that received less than 50% agreement on meaning and therefore carry more idiosyncratic interpretations include: the clones or automatons who were seen as representing brainwashed society (48%)--other meanings included modern American society, skinheads, computer illiterates, IBM users, U.S. businesses, and TV viewers. Big Brother symbolized a totalitarian despot to 45%, however other interpretations included a bureaucrat, Hitler, IBM and other computer companies. The police were seen as opposition to change by 40%, however the other meanings included capitalism, communism, big companies against change, Nazis, and sexist forces.

Oppositions After reading the viewers' analysis of the commercial, coders noted bipolar opposites contained in those comments. In addition to the 18 bipolar opposites coded according to Berger's semiotic analysis, 137 different con-cepts built on bipolar opposites were found in student responses, another measure of the eclecticism of viewer responses. A close reading of the analysis of the "1984" text by Berger and Scott and comparison with the viewer's responses revealed a set of six basic oppositions which seemed to dominate most of the interpretations: past/future, optimism/pessimism, friendly/unfriendly, liberator/controller, freedom/totalitarian, individual/conformity, and rebellious/passive.

Past and Future This commercial calls upon the viewer's understanding of all levels of narrative structure and, in particular, to the strange manipulation of time by which the present becomes intermingled with both past and future. In this narrative time warping adds to the sense of unreality. What is then (past), now (present) and the future?

The uncertainly of time arises from a confusion among the images of the past (slaves, Nazis, Hitler, the monumental gothic meeting room), the future (Orwell's

all-knowing ruler, the Darth Vader police, video-techtronics, science-fiction, futuristic setting) and the present (the contemporary woman and her clothes, the hammer). The viewer is teased with glimpses from all worlds without a grounding in any one perspective in time.

A process of 'circling back' (Denzin 1991) to an earlier cultural form and attaching it to a new commodity is evident in "1984" which uses a well-known, but old, piece of science fiction to introduce a new product. The outcome is a new form of signification which, as Denzin explains, "invokes the cultural nostalgia for an earlier form, resurrecting the cultural memories of that form and its moment while attaching a 'purified' cultural ethic to the new object. It places the newly advertised object in a seamless present which extends, unbroken, into the past."

The commercial also reflects the political neoconservatism of the 1980s with its emphasis on a romantic nostalgia for the past, and a general effacement of the boundaries between the past and the present that set the stage for a return to a new traditionalism in American life (Denzin 1991). This coincides with what Jameson (1984) identifies as a basic feature of postmodernism: the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents. His paradigm is the breakdown of temporality, memory, and sense of history (Featherstone 1991).

A time of economic growth, rampant consumption, and repressive politics, the eighties provided a perfect arena for Apple's announcement. The growing nostalgia for the past, might be interpreted as a manifest sign of the declining rate of creativity in late capitalism (Huyssen 1984, p. 57). Or could this circling back signal a legitimate dissatisfaction with modernity and a perpetual integration of forms in the quest for a postmodern alternative?

The smashing of Big Brother's image in "1984" represents an end to the old time (of science fiction) and the beginning of the time of freedom (freedom like we used to know in the past). The scenario suggests that we may be nostalgic for this new future/past-time, similar to the feelings expressed in the first line of science fiction film, *Star Wars* : "Long ago and far away . . " or in the phrase, "Space: the new frontier." In this commercial, science fiction becomes historical truth.

The analysis also looked at the viewers' understanding of time and the time contradictions. Of the 200 respondents, 61 (31%) had some notion of old vs new or now vs the future. Specifically 11 (5.5%) mentioned the future and 15 (7.5%) talked about a new age or new era. In terms of specific notice of time contradictions, however, few were aware of time shifting or time tension, although several did talk about a "grim future," and that departs from conventional texts where grim is usually associated with the past.

As part of their discussion of images and their meanings, viewers made time contradictions when referencing Big Brother. Several viewers attributed his meaning to 'the old order,' and 'hate meetings,' of the past; others said he was 'the future.' These references are juxtapositions of the implied futuristic science fiction genre with images of the historical past of Nazis and concentration camps. Other references indicated that viewers saw the runner as the future, clearly oppositional in time to the captives of computer technology who were intended by the authors to depict the past under the domination of IBM.

Technological Optimism/Pessimism

An interesting question about meaning in the "1984" commercial revolves around its conflicting presentation of technology. Modernism worshipped technology and industrial development and looked to science and progress with optimism. Science and technology were friendly. Postmodernists criticize the dehumanizing aspects of technology and detail the negative effects of machine and computer culture as hostile to humans. In particular, new social movements under the postmodern umbrella protest the rigid rules and programmed lifestyles of the technocrats, a

message that is clearly embedded in the "1984" commercial.

Hidden within the "1984" master narrative, is an advertising message about unfriendly (IBM) vs friendly technology (Macintosh). The ad suggests that we are in the midst of Baudrillard's (1988) age of "hyperreality", governed by a new technology in which cybernetic systems have the power to organize everyday life in either programmed or flexible forms. If hyperreality infers that the sign is reality, then the Apple logo becomes consumer salvation through friendly technology.

Clearly Orwell's message was postmodern, but one wonders how that message can be adopted--or coopted--by a computer company. How can a computer company align itself with viewpoints protesting technology? The computer is, after all, the symbol of technology in our time. The ideal that a computer company can be humanistic is a very complex and contradictory concept to postmodernists.

The commercial uses an argument against modernism's hidden dependence on the machine metaphor to mask its message, mixing codes to simultaneously condemn and encourage different brands of the same product category. Apple's logo is a metaphor for freedom, the antithesis of the view of computer as programmed state which is also presented in the commercial. The ad can also be framed as a battle between modern (IBM) and postmodern (Apple) elements of society in which the latter emerges victorious.

In terms of the friendly/unfriendly imagery, 8% of the viewers mentioned friendly technology or computers and 14% mentioned unfriendly technology or computers.

But did the viewers understand the more complex double-coding of technology as capable of being both a negative and a positive force? Can a computer company be successfully associated with a humanistic anti-technology message that exalts freedom and challenges the idea of a programmed state? Pieces of these messages showed up in a number of responses. The idea of a gigantic, super-powerful, bureaucratic company (IBM) vs a small, humanistic, open company (Apple), was noted by 12 (6%) of the viewers. The complex idea that a computer company was sponsoring a message of freedom as opposed to programmed behavior was expressed in different ways by 20% of the viewers using the following patterns of opposition: 'conformity' vs creativity (4), vs differences (4), vs change (4), vs innovation (5), vs breaking the mold (5), and vs breakthrough (4); controlled vs rebelling (2), and vs breakthrough (1); 'captive' vs change (3); and 'followers' vs breaking the mold (2), and vs breaking the norm (3).

Liberator and Controller Postmodernism is more than a response to the unfolding logic of late capitalism, it is also a study of power relationships. According to Jameson (1991), postmodernism traces a "simultaneous collapse and resurgence in popularity of old metanarratives concerning peace, freedom, communism, worldwide democracy, the 'end of history,' patriarchy, racism, and colonialism." In the commercial, themes of dictatorship, patriarchy and racism are certainly implied through Big Brother (dictator), a ruling male, and white dominance--the traditional faces of power in a society.

The conservative aspect of postmodernism that focuses on the dissemination of symbolic goods, which can be understood in terms of changes in the power-balances and interdependences between groups, directly relates to the political tensions suggested in "1984." Apple's transformation of society will bring about a change in power balance; at the same time, the commercial contains overtones of the neoconservative belief that politics must be kept as far as possible from the demands of moral-practical justification.

Are viewers sensitive to these concepts of the changing balance in power relationships? Power, and particularly control (9.5%), were mentioned a number of

times in the viewer's responses and 34% did note the captive/liberation relationship. A number of these readers'comments contained the idea that the woman's role was to overthrow the power and control represented by Big Brother. The notion that Macintosh was liberating was found in only 7% of the responses.

Freedom and Totalitarianism. Nine (4.5%) of the responses indicated some sense of a collective tyranny or controlled state. Certainly the woman represents freedom and creativity (the modern view) and the masses represent robots and automatons under the control of a totalitarian regime (the postmodern view).The notion that the woman represents freedom and creativity and the idea that the masses represent robots and automatons under the control of a totalitarian regime was mentioned by 34% of the viewers. In a slightly different view, 7% of the respondents were focused on the idea of a change agent, either the woman or the Mac bringing a new way of doing things; 16.5% mentioned 'change' within the context of their narrative analyses.

One of the rules under attack in postmodern advertising is the dominance of the product presentation, a doctrinaire approach to message design based on linear thought directed by transmission theories. As Sorgem (1991) explains, "In postmodern advertising, the reality of the product no longer provides a foundation" (p. 8). While this sounds like heresy to most advertisers, it does lead to a more involving relationship between the receiver and the message. This, in fact, is what is happening in the "1984" commercial where the receiver is involved in puzzling out the meaning of what initially is a very ambiguous presentation and where the viewer must create much of the new product introduction message.

Individualism and Conformity In the commercial, the passive media-addicted clones of the commercial are connected to our desire for individuality, which is most certainly the stuff of the country's dreams. The woman represents individualism, as well as rebellion against their conformity.

However, there are contradictions in the notion of rebellion in a consumer society as depicted in this commerical. The commercial is representative of "the theories of resistance that are lived by ordinary people in all its eclecticism and variety of voices (Denzin 1991, p. xi)." This story of resistance is typical of the 'feminist cultural studies' theory of Foucault's (1982) micro-politics which sees 'networks of power-relations subsisting at every point in society (Conner 1989, p. 225)."

Yet the symbol of resistance to commercialism is itself an endorsement of consumption. The message tells consumers to think for themselves at the same time it directs them toward a product. Viewers are directed not to follow the competition, rather to follow Apple and buy a Mac.

The idea that the woman represents individualism as well as rebellion against the conformity of the masses was noted by 43% of the viewers. How did viewers respond to the idea that they were being encouraged to be free (think for themselves, don't follow others) at the same time they were being encouraged to buy a product?

*Male and Female.*Using a story about power, the commercial presents a female youth to symbolize resistance and revolution---a non-traditional postmodern approach for a patriarchal consumer culture message. If, according to Denzin (1991), women are the bearers of freedom then this commercial's use of a female metaphor for Apple, makes sense.

Is the blonde runner (Eve) who brings freedom to the technology-bound synonymous with the seductive strategy of advertising that exposes the drama of communication to seduce the postmodern consumer? The Eve-Apple connection certainly suggests a seduction. The ad's gender substitution (female for male as a symbol of power) risks awakening all kinds of sexual overtones; on the other hand, the genderless clones may suggest a feminiza-

tion of the American public self. The latter thesis arose from evidence that feminism has been alone in attempting to envision the Utopian languages spoken in societies in which gender domination and inequality would have ceased to exist.[1]

The ad reveals an indifference to sexual differences by presenting clones; their presence is indicative of the uneasy encounter between feminism and postmodernism. However, the commercial seems to move in the direction of the feminist approach to postmodernism which argues that a systematic deconstruction of cultural myths about women must occur before inequality will disappear; this argument is made here without incorporating the violence usually representative of feminist statements in postmodern text. The commercial's juxtaposition of gender roles presents a situation in which one sign functions as the interpretant of another and is subject to change without notice.

This commercial was filled with postmodern gender imagery and it was clearly noted by many of the respondents. The biggest area of consensus in the meanings produced by the viewers was the specific noting of the woman's gender: 84.5% responses contained that element. In terms of oppositional structures, the idea of the genderless clones saved by a female figure was noted by 42% of the viewers. The idea of dominated and depersonalized males in contrast to a free, strong female was noted by 44.5% viewers.

Postmodern Advertising The traditional postmodern view of advertising as the spear-carrier of capitalism reflects a level of cynicism that, as one might expect, was not apparent in the viewer's responses. Only six (3%) of the viewers responded with any com-ment sprecifically related to an appeal to buy the product, an indication that, as one might expect after viewing the commercial, the sales dimension of the message's meaning was not very strong. And none of these six viewers who were conscious of an appeal to purchase were able to express a sense of contradiction in the freedom/individualism message being produced by a computer company. It should be noted, however, that Apple's overall message of the introduction of a new product was mentioned by 85 percent of the viewers and it dominated the readings of 48 percent, so the big message of the product launch definitely did not get lost.

Conclusion

The "1984" commercial is an interesting example of the conflict between modern and postmodern messages. In true postmodern style the commercial often says one thing while meaning another: it suggests that the future world will be dominated by unfriendly technology at the same time presenting the Macintosh computer as a friendly antidote to that vision. It suggests that while computers can make people programmed robots, the Macintosh will make them free and creative. In advertising terms, the commercial is "selling against its category," an extremely difficult message to communicate that requires that the audience sort through multiple levels of ironic meanings.

This analysis of responses to the commercial strongly suggests that viewer interpretations noted a number of postmodern elements: in particular, the responses contained many oppositional patterns and revealed a tendency toward eclectic and idiosyncratic meaning, particularly in the interpretation of certain message elements such as Big Brother, the police, and the setting. More than half were aware of the counter positioning of freedom and totalitarian symbols. Almost half noted some conflict between individualism and conformity and that same number noted the reversal of gender roles. Only one fifth, however, had some sense of the conflict between friendly and unfriendly technology. On the other hand, although a third noted the time element, few were able to articulate the past/future contradictions.

While these comments generally tended to reflect postmodern reading strategies, the post-modern elements were also the ones with the most frequent mentions.

For example, in the clash between control and resistance, 49 percent noted control or some aspect of it such as brainwashing and indoctrination while 41 percent noted the resistance, revolution, rebellion factor. In other words, viewers seemed to be more impressed with the negative aspect of the controlled society, which is a typical postmod-ern reading strategy. The same pattern showed up in the confrontation between notions of conformity and individualism and unfriendly and friendly. In both of those oppositional sets, the viewers were more likely to load their interpretations on the side of conformity or unfriendly which are more typically postmodern readings.

However in the contrast between totalitarian and freedom, the opposite interpretation can be seen with freedom receiving more mentions, reflecting a modernist view of technology. Of course, that was the positioning strategy behind the Macintosh message, so it is a testimony to the success of this commercial, that the freedom message separated itself from the overwhelmingly post-modern reading orientation with its critical view of technology.

While this interpretive analyses of viewer readings found a plethora of idiosyncratic meanings, it also found an astonishing lack of sales message elements. Could this mean that '90s consumers, weary of being pitched to buy products, prefer to embrace a product-absent metanarrative and respond to advertising that maximizes its entertainment value? Does the presence of intertextual references evidence a spectrum of unintended advertising messages that are beyond the control of the commercial's author/sponsor? Only further research can respond to those questions; and only through a qualitative investigation of commercial readings can the richness of viewing be appreciated for its contribution to understanding the postmodern consumer.

Finally, in the analysis of the artistic tension between the two stories--the use of an artful science fiction narrative to communicate the idea of a friendly computer and the use of chilling visual artistry to communicate the imagery of an unfriendly world--the friendly computer story seemed to dominate. The product story was, in fact, dominant with almost half of the viewers' responses (48%) noting that as the primary message. Another third of the responses interpreted the message in terms of both stories, while only 10 percent focused primarily or exclusively on the "1984" storyline. It is clear that the negative postmodern imagery did not overwhelm the positive story of a new technology. In fact, we know that is true by tracing the commercial's marketplace impact. The artistry of the sixty-second drama moved over 200,000 of the original viewers to purchase a Macintosh on the following Monday, its first day on the market.

Endnotes

[1] *See other science fiction examples such as Samuel Delany's reply in "Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand (NY, 1984) in which the feminine pronoun is used universally for the psychic subject.*

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